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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004830

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SUNNI OUTREACH: IECI COMMISSIONER VISITS RAMADI

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MICHAEL J. ADLER
FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Summary: IECI Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Adel al-Ami visited Ramadi December 1 to discuss preparations for the upcoming elections. In a joint meeting with coalition forces (CF), the governor, local leaders, and representatives from IFES and the NGO Iraqi Institute for Peace, the following operational topics were addressed: number and location of polling centers; origin and training of electoral staff; the roles of CF, Iraqi security forces (ISF) and tribes in providing security for polling sites; and how to facilitate voting by persons internally displaced by fighting. Following Al-Ami's departure, CF returned to the topic of security with the local leaders and governor (see ref A and septel). CF, IECI Commissioner Craig Jeness, IFES, and State met December 2 to review the outcome of the Ramadi discussion; a follow-up meeting in Baghdad on election logistics between 2nd Marine Division's Assistant Division Commander General Williams and the IECI al-Ami is scheduled for December 4. All parties are committed to increasing Sunni engagement in the political process, but the challenging security environment has handicapped planning for the elections. End Summary.

2. (C) As part of IECI's MNF-I and Embassy-supported Sunni Arab outreach campaign, Commissioner and Chief Electoral Officer Adel al-Ami traveled to Ramadi December 1, via milair and accompanied by representatives from IFES, State, and USAID. The party joined Anbar CF and SET officer in the offices of Governor Ma'moon Sami Rasheed. Local leaders, who attended the meeting to discuss security matters with CF, joined the elections discussion, as did a Baghdad-based representative of the Iraqi Institute for Peace (or IIP, which is assisting IECI in hiring provincially-based staff to administer the elections).

Sites and Staffing

3. (C) The governor forcefully lobbied al-Ami for a larger number of polling centers (or, sites) in residential neighborhoods and the employment of Anbaris to staff the polling sites. The local leaders supported these points. In response to a proposed CF plan for election day that involved limited movement of vehicles, the Iraqis said they preferred a ban on traffic on December 15, arguing it would be safer and reasoning that the importance of the election justified the inconvenience. There was a fruitful exchange on desired locations of polling sites in Ramadi, and a commitment to address finalizing the site locations for the rest of al-Anbar province in a follow-up meeting in Baghdad December 4.

4. (C) The question of local staff proved more problematic. While all agreed it was preferable to hire local staff, in part as a means of increasing Sunni participation in the elections, the group was unable to agree on the mechanics of identifying, hiring, and training the staff -- given the short time frame and security concerns. The governor's resistance to the proposed IIP role in recruiting local staff, and his apparent mistrust of an unfamiliar organization represented by an outsider, was echoed by senior sheikh Anwar al-Kharbit, who grilled the NGO representative: "Who is the founder of your organization? Where are you from? We know nothing about you." (Note: IFES subsequently informed us that IIP had briefed the governor's aides on its plans, which included a list of 6,750 local names.) In a December 2 meeting in Baghdad, IECI Craig Jeness and IFES Jeff Fischer acknowledged IIP shortcomings to CF and State, but said that they believe this NGO is the only organization that can organize the hiring of impartial local staff. It was agreed to revisit this issue with Anbar leadership.

Sunni Concerns

5. (C) The governor and local leaders pressed for a lead role by Iraqi security forces in providing security on election day. Commander of Second Marine Division's 2BCT, Colonel Gronski, explained that the ISF would be the security face at polling sites, and that CF would provide perimeter, QRF and other support. The governor insisted that the election be a "test" of ISF capability. General Williams urged local leaders to encourage the men in their community to respond to recruiting efforts and join the ISF

to increase its force size in Anbar. Colonel Gronski asked if the tribes were willing to provide security for polling sites in Ramadi; several of the tribal leaders said it was absolutely not possible. When pressed by PolOff, they demurred, arguing they wanted to avoid potential intra-tribal feuds and association with CF. (Note: Some tribes in western Anbar, however, have offered to provide sole security for polling sites in their area.) PolOff explained that the election was a critical step in addressing Sunni concerns; the Sunni voice from Anbar must become part of the new national government in order to play a role in determining Iraq's security policy; therefore, the tribal leaders should urge their communities to vote and act responsibly on December 15. The local leaders urged CF to decrease military operations in the run-up to the elections, and complained to PolOff about the traffic of armoured vehicles in Ramadi.

16. (C) The governor raised the issue of internally displaced persons, claiming that a large number of Anbar residents who had been displaced by military operations feared they would not be permitted to vote. (Note: The IECI, which informally permitted Anbaris to vote at any location during the October referendum, is considering issuing a statement to that effect in Anbar province with regards to the December 15 election, although weighing the fact that such a gesture to the Sunni Arab community in Anbar could open the IECI up to charges of fraud.) He also asked about the right of detainees to vote. The local leaders complained that the number of representatives from Anbar to the new assembly had been decreased from Saddam's time, and blamed this fact on the "American project" to disenfranchise the Sunni community. Al-Ami explained how the TNA had developed and adopted the electoral law. He also provided a robust defense of the independence of the IECI, and stressed to the local leaders the importance of a large Sunni turnout at the election.

KHALILZAD